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NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN FAMILY PLANNING

A Guide For Program Development

Alberta
SOCIAL SERVICES
AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

NEEDS ASSESSMENT
IN FAMILY PLANNING

- A GUIDE FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT -

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FOREWORD

On a personal, national and global level, there is a great need for information and services related to family planning. In fact, family planning programs exist in most countries of the world in various forms depending on the particular beliefs, resources and politics of each country.

The area of family planning is unique in the health care/health education field, affected as it is by sexual taboos, moral issues, and lack of information. For example, a health unit (or other jurisdiction) setting out to establish a school dental or nutrition program may not decide to solicit the cooperation of the clergy, social workers and youth development officers. Blood pressure screening surveys do not necessarily involve school boards, parent groups or special teen groups. Yet all of these groups (and many more) would likely be interested and influential in the planning, offering, or successful operation of a family planning program.

Because of the special nature of the family planning field, documentation and credibility might be considered more important than in other more universally accepted programs. Identifying and describing family planning needs could provide a base for planning a program custom-designed for a particular community. This manual provides encouragement and direction for personnel such as family planning workers, parents, doctors, school staffs, nurses, social workers and clergy.

It is with the intent to provide help in assessing the family planning needs of a community that this manual has been written.

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CHAPTER I - OUTLINE

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: DEFINITION AND PURPOSES

A. Definitions

B. Purposes of Conducting Needs Assessment

1. Identifying and defining problems
2. Long and short-term planning
3. Establishing priorities
4. Accountability
5. Involving the community
6. Providing information about behavior, beliefs, attitudes
7. Identifying needs, wants, preferences
8. Providing statistical data

C. Reasons Why Research Findings May Not Be Used

1. Information unrelated to community problems
2. Use of complex technical language
3. Irrelevant information
4. Unexpected findings

D. Consequences of Ignoring Research Findings

1. Negative feelings
2. Loss of credibility
3. Decrease in support
4. Jeopardy of organization

E. Summary of Research Methods

1. Social and health indicators
2. Casual observations
3. Nominal group technique
4. Community forum
5. Key informant survey
6. Delphi technique
7. Community survey

CHAPTER I. NEEDS ASSESSMENT: DEFINITION AND PURPOSES

CHAPTER I: SECTION A

Definitions

The following are just a few of the ways in which NEEDS ASSESSMENT has been defined. Each is an appropriate definition when adapted to the field of Family Planning.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT seeks to identify conditions which precede and/or cause problems which are to be prevented.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT is used to determine the problems and goals of the residents of a given community in order to plan services which will respond to their needs.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT has to do with setting priorities among identified competing needs, taking into account the resources available.

NEEDS ASSESSMENTS are carried out by those delivering services to identify target populations and to direct programming.

CHAPTER I: SECTION B

Purposes of Conducting Needs Assessments

Whether you are assessing needs in order to develop a new family planning program or in order to improve an existing one, some major purposes of your research might be:

1. Identifying and defining problems

   Are there any family planning services being offered in the community? Do health care workers have requests they cannot meet? Where do people get family planning information now? How can existing services be improved?

2. Long and short-term planning

   What groups need family planning services? Are the existing programs adequate or should they be changed? Would people be willing to pay for services? Are additional staff required to provide family planning services?

3. Establishing priorities

   Which programs are crucial and which are optional? Which group would constitute the largest number of users? In which areas do statistics indicate serious problems?

4. Accountability

   Are we reaching the people who need family planning services? Are our budgets based on realistic needs? A needs assessment can be a demonstration of credibility in that it shows that plans related to identified needs are being carefully carried out.

5. Involving the community

   Who decides what the people of the community need/want/prefer? Do people want to be involved or would they rather have "experts" make family planning program decisions? What agencies or institutions would be prepared to help with family planning services?

The very act of conducting a needs assessment raises the profile of family planning in the community and can lead to increased involvement, greater awareness and more support. Of course, the reverse can also occur in that conducting a survey may trigger opposition. Each community has to weigh the risks before proceeding, but the public relations benefits can be one of the most important and educational by-products of a needs assessment study.

6. Providing information about behavior, beliefs, attitudes

Do respondents have beliefs that they do not act on? Needs assessment research can provide information about people's behavior, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and social characteristics. Attitudes and feelings may be important clues as to whether people are likely to use a family planning service, for example.

7. Identifying needs, wants, preferences

What do people in the community want in terms of family planning services? A needs assessment study can provide an opportunity for people to express their needs, to talk about what they want, and to say what they prefer given several alternatives. Professionals may think that the public needs a certain service while the public says they want something else.

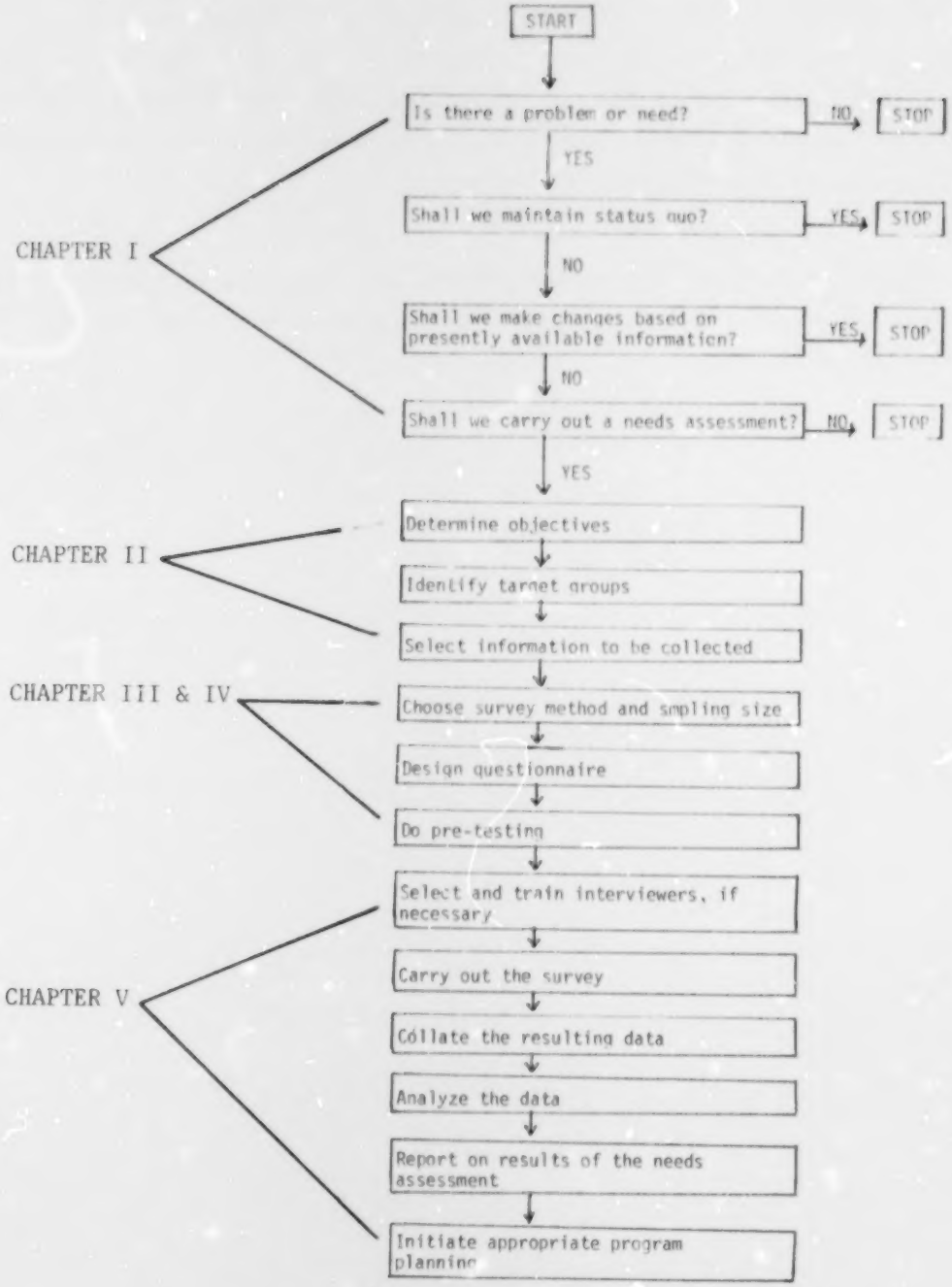
8. Providing statistical data base

The carrying out of a needs assessment can provide a data baseline to which future findings can be compared. If we institute a family planning program this year, what will we be able to measure five years from now? Do married couples with access to family planning programs have fewer unplanned pregnancies? If a decision is made to plan programs based on findings, a needs assessment can provide figures to be used to measure program effectiveness.

Other purposes and benefits of conducting a needs assessment may apply in individual situations and it's very important to consider them all. In addition, it is useful to consider alternatives to carrying out a needs assessment and also to look at the activities involved during the process. The flow-chart on the following page illustrates some steps that will be taken prior to and during a needs assessment study.

* You may want to refer to the Activity Flow Chart (page 6) at the beginning of subsequent chapters to see how the contents of each chapter fit into the over-all plan.

ACTIVITY FLOW-CHART



CHAPTER I: SECTION C

Reasons Why Research Findings May Not Be Used

Before looking specifically at what information might be gathered from a needs assessment it is important to realize that often research findings are not acted upon. Knowing that there are reasons why research information may be put on permanent "hold" or rejected outright may prevent your needs assessment from being a waste of time and energy, an exercise in futility.

1. Information unrelated to community problems

   The findings may not be relevant to the problems in the community or they may show no direction for improvement. If your survey shows that 15 year olds are embarrassed to talk to their parents about sex but does not ask who they would be comfortable discussing this with, what can be done with the information? If a survey of doctors shows that they feel they do not have adequate time to discuss birth control with their patients, does that mean that people do not have information about birth control methods? Perhaps it would be more useful to survey users about their knowledge of birth control and desired sources of information.

2. Use of complex and/or technical language

   Findings might be presented in complex technical language that is difficult to understand. Avoid jargon. If you report from your survey that primiparas use barrier methods with antispermicidal agents will the reader find that significant, relevant, decipherable? If the survey includes a question about "sexual decision-making" will the respondent understand whether you mean a) deciding the sex of your child, b) deciding whether to be straight or gay, or c) deciding whether or when to have intercourse?

3. Irrelevant information

Is the information relevant? Is it what was asked for? Findings may be interesting but if there is no money for programs the research is of little value. Perhaps no one is really committed to taking action based on the findings. Or else the people who were keen about the study are no longer on staff or have moved away.

4. Unexpected findings

What if you've turned up information that is surprising or disappointing? You may find there is no interest in a family planning service in your community. If your program has been mainly educational and the survey shows a real need for counselling services, what will you do? If, in carrying out the needs assessment, your profile is raised and causes opposing forces to mobilize, how will you turn that into positive publicity?

Decision makers will be wise to consider ways to make their findings on-target, interesting and directive; otherwise the negative consequences might outweigh the positive.

CHAPTER I: SECTION D

Consequences of Ignoring Research Findings

Failure to take action after a needs assessment has been carried out, may result in certain consequences.

1. Negative feelings

   When research is not acted upon, people may well become angry, confused, hopeless and suspicious. People's expectations are raised when they are involved in answering questions.

2. Loss of credibility

   Failing to act on needs assessment findings appears inefficient and suggests a lack of commitment. The study loses credibility and so may the organization and its workers.

3. Decrease in support

   Supporters of a family planning program will be disappointed and frustrated if no improvements are made after needs have been identified. Doctors who need help with educating and counselling patients may withdraw support from a program that does not follow up on their stated needs.

4. Jeopardy of organization

   If time, money, and manpower are used to carry out a needs assessment that shows no tangible results not only will financial accountability be an issue but the very effectiveness of the program may be called into question.

   The intention here is not to discourage agencies from conducting a family planning needs assessment. But it is a very important early planning step to anticipate possible results and how they will be used.

CHAPTER I: SECTION E

Summary of Research Methods

Careful planning is the single most important factor in carrying out a needs assessment. The plan and subsequent analysis determine how the assessment information will be used. Deciding on the method or methods to be used is a key point. Greater detail about each method is included in Chapter III but a brief summary of needs assessment tools is given here for consideration. Some of the most commonly used methods to determine needs in a community are:

1. Social and Health Indicators - government statistics, user rates, population trends.
2. Casual Observations - more people seen reading pamphlets, notice of younger age of pregnant women, man-on-the-street interviews.
3. Nominal Group Technique - a guided process to gather information from a group of people.
4. Community Forum - a public gathering (either structured or unstructured) where information, guidelines, and opinions are sought.
5. Key Informant Survey - surveying (in person, by phone, or mail) influential or expert (knowledgeable) people in the community.
6. Delphi Technique - a series of mail-out questionnaires that involve a selected number of respondents, either key informants or representatives of the community at large.
7. Community Survey - surveying (in person, by phone, or by mail) a sample of community residents who are considered to be representative of the community as a whole.

For the purposes of this manual, the last five methods will be dealt with in some detail. The first method, Social and Health Indicators, is already widely used and the second, Casual Observations, has merit but is not considered statistically valid.

It is generally recommended, in writings about needs assessment, that using more than one method is preferable to relying on a single survey. In other words, combining two or three of the above will give a clearer picture of

actual need, will involve more people and will yield more information than any one of them used alone.

CHAPTER II - OUTLINE

PLANNING FOR A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A. Time Lines and Budgeting

1. Initial planning
2. Collating results: computer or manual?
3. Deciding on research method(s)
4. Developing research tools
5. Administering questionnaire
6. Dealing with results of the survey

B. Co-ordination of the Needs Assessment

1. One coordinator
2. Co-ordinator from within organization
3. Outside consultant/resource person
4. Questions to be asked
5. Advisory committee

C. Determining Objectives

1. Importance of clear objectives
2. Guidelines for writing survey objectives

D. Identifying Target Populations

1. Limitations
2. Secondary gains
3. Type of community
4. Individual preferences/skills
5. Key informants or general public?

E. Identifying Survey Questions

CHAPTER II. PLANNING FOR A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Because planning, establishing the purpose of a needs assessment, and clarifying and setting objectives are such crucial steps, plenty of time should be taken to meet and think and re-consider the process before it actually begins.

CHAPTER II: SECTION A

Timelines and Budgeting

Two key issues related to conducting a needs assessment are (1) time required and (2) costs. Because assessment will vary greatly depending on local factors it is difficult to be precise about timelines and budgets. Still, there are certain considerations that will have a bearing on these two important areas.

1. Initial planning

   In the planning stage, a greater or lesser amount of time can be taken depending on how many decision-makers are to be involved and/or kept informed. Are they easy to reach? Will one casual get-together set the wheels in motion or will a series of planning meetings have to be scheduled over a period of weeks? If staff are fairly knowledgeable about assessments and surveys, less time will be required than if it is their first experience with survey research. A decision to employ an outside consultant may involve recruitment and hiring time and then orientation to the project. It also takes time to search out existing information such as local statistics, records, time of year end, lists of names, appropriate meeting dates, and so on.

   Costs will be dependent on the foregoing factors and also on travelling required to involve planners, hiring professionals, etc.

2. Collating results: COMPUTER or MANUAL?

Dealing with results seems to be in the rather distant future at this point, however, the decision about using a computer needs to be made now. This decision will affect sample size, types of research methods, kinds of questions to be asked and types of personnel required.

Computers can save time and are useful for dealing with hard facts and generating firm statistics. But there are advantages to manual analysis as well. The following charts show advantages and disadvantages of each method.

FIG. 1 Collating by Computer: Advantages and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Useful for large samples (over 200 questionnaires).	1) Does not necessarily save time with smaller samples (up to 150 or so).
2) Quick way to record responses to closed or multiple-choice questions.	2) May limit or bias questions by requiring a particular format.
3) May be more accurate than manual counts and calculations.	3) Requires expertise in computer operation or else results may be inaccruate.
4) May have more credibility among people who are "into computers".	4) Important information may be lost when no one actually reads answers or deals with the completed questionnaire.
5) Lends itself to sophisticated questions, is able to figure out complex correlations.	5) Renting a computer and/or buying computer time may be costly.
	6) Unsuitable for open-ended questions or for dealing with extra information provided spontaneously by a respondent.

FIG. 2 Collating Manually: Advantages and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Provides "hands on" experience for researcher and a "feel" for the information being processed.	1) Takes too long with large samples.
2) Probably quicker and cheaper with smaller sample sizes (*).	2) If extra staff need to be hired, may be more costly.
3) Does not require availability of computer or specialized knowledge.	3) Does not lend itself to complex correlations or sophisticated calculations.
4) Allows greater freedom and flexibility in question design.	

* A way to determine actual time and costs is to estimate time required and who will do it. For example: a questionnaire taking 30 minutes to answer, might take 15 minutes to collate. Therefore, for a sample of 200 questionnaires:

200 x 15 minutes = 3000 ÷ 60 = 50 hours of analysing time or about 3 days for 2 people, etc.

3. Deciding on research methods

It could be that researchers will have already established methods to be used in which case no additional time is required. Or plans may include two methods, one that's familiar to the people involved as well as one that will take time to get to understand.

In choosing the process to be followed, consider these factors:

* Who will develop questionnaires, posters, etc. - staff, volunteers? How long will it take?
* What kind of results are needed? Are you looking for general information and opinions or do you need hard facts that can be translated into statistics and graphs? The latter type of information takes longer to plan and design for.

* How large a sample will you use? The more people you survey, the greater the time and cost.
* If you are going to be surveying a population whose participation requires prior approval by another authority, how long will it take to get such approval?
* If you need user lists, how long will it take to get them? Will they need revising?
* Postage and mailing time and costs need to be considered. Will you send out reminder letters and/or replacement questionnaires?
* Are there materials around that can be used as is? Perhaps an existing questionnaire can be adapted or perhaps a survey plan was written up by someone in the past.

Here are some general guidelines that may be helpful.

* With face-to-face interviews, an average of 2 calls is necessary to yield one interview.
* With telephone surveys, between 2.2 and 4 calls are required to complete one interview.
* With mail-out questionnaires, you will probably have to send reminders to half the sample and a third letter to half of the second mailing.

So, apart from the particular appeal or appropriateness of certain survey methods, time and cost factors must be considered. It may simply be that there is not enough time to conduct a Delphi survey (2-3 months) or not enough staff to make 300 phone calls or no money to develop and mail 500 questionnaires. Planners can keep in mind some ways of augmenting or multiplying existing resources: special grants, additional staff hired under government make-work programs, corporate donations, donations of money and/or time by local individuals or service clubs, inter-agency contributions, church sponsorship, sharing project with other jurisdictions, and, last but not least, the use of volunteers.

4. Developing research tools

When it comes to developing research tools a lot will depend on how much detail is required and how many topics will be dealt with. If you have someone on staff with research experience or if you have a steering committee that works smoothly and efficiently, your time and costs will be kept down. (A guideline about questionnaire-writing: it takes an average of 1½ days to develop a 50-item questionnaire.)

Also to be considered here are things like composing covering letters, developing posters for community forums, preparing ads if you are going to announce your survey through the media, deciding on the format to be used to report the results of the survey, and writing thank-yous. These things all take time and manpower and have related costs.

5. Administering questionnaire

The administering of a questionnaire is often seen as the survey itself. Certainly it is a key element and perhaps the most exciting but it is only one step in the whole needs assessment process. In attempting to estimate time required and costs associated with actually using questionnaires these factors need to be kept in mind.

* Deciding on format and coding.
* Pre-testing of questionnaires.
* Necessary revisions.
* Typing of letters, questionnaires, envelopes.
* Photocopying or other duplication.
* Paper and postage costs (remember reminders).
* Training of interviewers for person-to-person and telephone surveys.
* Long-distance telephone charges, extra phone installation.

(Guidelines:

1. Developing 200 mail-out questionnaires may cost in total, from $8.00 to $20.00 per questionnaire.
2. For a telephone survey of 200 calls, the average total cost might be between $9.00 and $25.00 per completed call.
3. In person-to-person interviews, average cost can be between $20.00 and $50.00 depending on type of survey, travel time, salaries.)

6. Dealing with results of the survey

Time and costs are also a factor as survey results come in. Will you be summarizing coded responses or open-ended questions? The latter take much longer. Will summarizing of coded questions be done manually or by computer? A computer is quicker unless you have to send your results away and wait for a week or more for them to be collated. But that does require less staff. Generally, it's more efficient to handle a fairly small sample (under 200) manually with the help of clerical staff or volunteers. For computer collating, it's very important to have expert help from a resource person, a private firm, a government agency, or a college or university.

When the information has been gathered it needs to be assembled in a way that can be reported. The length and detail of reports will determine how much time it will take to prepare them and what costs will be incurred. Here again, accompanying letters may need to be written, photocopying and mailing costs will likely result and there may be costs associated with publishing your findings.

To summarize this section on timelines and budgeting, it is important to take a broad overview of your needs assessment project beforehand in order to anticipate and project time required and money to be budgeted. Breaking the process up into segments helps to clarify thinking and makes the whole seem more manageable. There are almost always unexpected elements that crop up, so being able to build some flexibility into your resource planning is highly recommended.

CHAPTER II: SECTION B

Co-ordination of the Needs Assessment

1. One co-ordinator

One identified coordinator is desirable in the interests of organization, continuity, and keeping on track. Whether this person is someone from within the organization or an outside consultant, will depend on specific circumstances and needs. The following examines advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

FIG. 3 Co-ordinator from Within Organization

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Has knowledge of the organization, the community, the history, the general situation.	1) May be biased by own perceptions, experiences, needs.
2) Already paid - no additional cost.	2) Possibility of conflict with other team members.
3) May require little or no additional office space.	3) Existing work may suffer because of new responsibilities.
4) Could be involved in future program development or changes based on new needs assessment information.	4) May have little knowledge, background or interest in research/needs assessment.
	5) May lack credibility as a "local".

FIG. 4 Outside Consultant/ as Co-ordinator

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Comes with no preconceived ideas, biases, etc.	1) May have little or no knowledge of the community, its history, make-up, etc.
2) Brings expertise in guiding the process and helping the organization.	2) Contacts/relationships developed within the community are lost when consultant moves on.
3) Can be held accountable through terms of employment such as time lines, results expected, payment considerations.	3) Will not be around to act on results of survey.
4) May have more credibility if seen as "an expert".	4) May incur higher costs for salary, office space, etc.

Whatever route is taken, the Co-ordinat has a very important role to play in goal-setting and determining objectives.

4. Questions to be asked

In planning how the needs assessment will be carried out, those who are to be involved should ask some key questions and analyze the results.

WHO

- Who requested the needs assessment?
- Who will decide what plan will be followed?
- Who will have responsibility for carrying out the needs assessment?
- Who else needs to be involved?
- Who will the workers be (existing staff, hired co-ordinator, volunteers)?
- Who will have input into decision making? which decisions?
- Who will be surveyed (general public, teens, doctors, teachers)?
- Who will pay for the needs assessment?
- Who will compile, collate and analyze the results?

- Who will report on the findings and to whom?
- Who has done similar studies?
- Who will be responsible for taking action based on the findings?
- Who will benefit from the needs assessment?
- Who else could be affected by the findings?

WHAT

- What information is needed/wanted?
- What type of survey methods will be used?
- What questions will be asked?
- What kind of publicity does the needs assessment require?
- What will be done with the information when we get it?
- What do we hope to learn from this project?
- What benefits will there be as a result of the needs assessment?
- What is the attitude of people to this survey - staff, professionals, general public?
- What similar studies have been done? what did they show?

WHERE

- Where are the people to be surveyed (one city, one health unit, one school, the province)?
- Where will the needs assessment headquarters be?
- Where will we find workers (clerical, planning committee, co-ordinator, interviewers)?
- Where will we advertize/publicize?
- Where will we get extra help (Libraries, University, Community College, Provincial Government)
- Where have similar studies been done?

WHY

- Why is a needs assessment necessary at this time?
- Why do we want new information?
- Why did the people who requested it do so?
- Why will we choose a particular method or process?
- Why will we ask the questions we choose?
- Why will people want to cooperate with us?
- Why will the results be important?

HOW
- How much time do we have?
- How much money is there to spend on needs assessment?
- How will carrying out this project affect existing programs, staff, service?
- How will planning and organizing be done?
- How will decisions be made?
- How will we involve others in the community?
- How will we train workers (if necessary)?
- How will we show appreciation to people who have been involved?
- How will negative reaction be handled?
- How will mailing, interviewing, collating, etc. be handled?
- How will reporting be done?
- How will results be acted upon?
- How will we adapt if changes are indicated?
- How can we have fun while doing the needs assessment?

Other questions in each category will occur to anyone planning a needs assessment in a specific agency or community. The list of questions may seem intimidating but answers to many of them will have been determined beforehand.

Looking at these questions will help to provide "a larger picture" and may prevent rushing into a plan without considering potential problems It also helps to identify differences in perception among key individuals. Does the Medical Officer of Health see the purposes of the needs assessment in the same way as the Chairman of the Health Unit Board? Does the secretary agree that she will have extra time for typing, mailing, etc.? If staff members agree to carry out the needs assessment but have to cut back on other duties, will that be OK? If money for the research project is siphoned away from another program, what will the reaction be? Acceptance and cooperation are key elements in setting goals for a successful needs assessment.

5. Advisory committee

One way of generating various ideas and of sharing goal-setting and decision-making is to set up a core group of people who agree to undertake a steering or advisory role. Ideally, the members of such a group would have knowledge of the community, its people, and their needs, as well as an interest in family planning. Some candidates for membership might be teachers, parents, doctors, public health nurses, teens, clergy, social workers, Health Unit directors, aldermen, youth leaders, etc.

Since these tend to be busy people who may have trouble attending frequent meetings, a goal should be to have them come together at crucial points in the needs assessment process to receive a progress report, to provide input and to guide the process along. The number of committee members should number no more than twelve, otherwise the proceedings become cumbersome. The following chart may clarify some issues regarding use of an advisory committee.

FIG. 5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Using an Advisory Committee When Conducting a Needs Assessment

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Generates a variety of ideas and opinions.	1) Members may have their own vested interest or hidden agenda.
2) Decisions and responsibilities are shared.	2) Members may or may not represent actual needs and perceptions from the community.
3) Provides viewpoints from a broad spectrum of community.	3) Keeping committee members informed is time-consuming.
4) Provides liaison and support for people working on needs assessment.	4) Organizing meetings, gathering materials printed, etc. makes extra work.
5) Increases credibility and awareness of the study in the community.	5) Potential for conflict exists if there is disagreement among individual members.
6) Establishes and increases lines of communication between agencies.	6) Process breaks down if members do not attend meetings or otherwise do not cooperate.
7) Fosters greater participation in (and therefore acceptance of) a family planning service.	7) Strong, vocal members may take over control and direction from others.

If a core advisory group is not used then the goal-setting and decision-making functions will have to be carried out by family planning staff or by others who will be involved with the needs assessment.

Despite potential shortcomings, an advisory group, functioning well, can be a cornerstone of a vital and productive needs assessment.

CHAPTER II: SECTION C

Determining Objectives

1. Importance of clear objectives

If you don't know where you're going, it's hard to tell when you've arrived. Well developed objectives provide clear direction throughout the course of the needs assessment. These will have a bearing on who your target group(s) will be and how large a survey needs to be done. Your objectives will also influence the kinds of questions to be asked, what method of asking would be best, and how the results will be handled. And, of course, your objectives will have an important bearing on how many workers are needed and how much the needs assessment will cost.

2. Guidelines for writing survey objectives

The following tips may help to simplify the task of setting objectives.

a. Start with the word "to" followed by an action work such as "assess", "identify", "describe", "priorize", etc.
b. Identify one specific key result to be accomplished.
c. Be realistic and attainable, yet challenging.
d. Be as specific and measurable as possible.
e. Be understandable to all those involved with the survey.
f. Answer the questions: What do we want or need to know? Why do we want to know it? What will we do with the information?

An example of an objective for a family planning needs assessment would be:

Objective: To identify and priorize the family planning needs of this community in order to develop programs that will meet those needs.

Well developed objectives provide direction and focus and are the basis on which the success of the survey can be judged.

CHAPTER II: SECTION D

Identifying Target Populations

Many factors will have a bearing on who will be chosen as respondents in a needs assessment.

1. Limitations

   Limitations are a key consideration here. If you're absolutely limited to a certain budget expenditure, you may have to decide on surveying only 20 people rather than 200. In this case you may decide to focus on 20 "experts" or key informants rather than on the general public. Or you may have only 1 month in which to do a survey in which case mail-out questionnaires would be impractical and you may be limited to interviewing people in person or by telephone. If the objectives of your needs assessment study single out one particular group (teenagers, for example) you may decide to limit your study to people who have greatest knowledge of teens.

2. Secondary gains

   In addition to limitations, you might look at secondary gains that may result from the carrying out of a study. If you want to gain publicity and/or support for a program you might choose a larger survey involving a broad spectrum of the population. If a goal is to educate and inform colleagues, you may decide to survey professionals in the community. If you're hoping to increase teens' use of a resource centre, you might choose young people as respondents.

3. Type of community

   The type of community to be surveyed will influence the target population. If it's a large rural community, perhaps surveying the parents from one or two school areas would be more feasible than surveying all the parents in the total community. A particular problem may have been identified in a certain segment of the population (e.g. recent immigrants) and the needs assessment would necessarily focus on that community.

4. Individual preferences/skills

Individual preferences and/or skills can have an influence on who forms the target group. Perhaps the Medical Officer of Health wishes to undertake a pilot study to assess family planning needs as perceived by doctors in his Health Unit. Or else someone on staff with your organization has experience with surveying teenagers. These kinds of circumstances may weigh in favor of certain population groups being surveyed.

5. Key informants

Perhaps the most important issue to be addressed in choosing a target group, is whether that group will be drawn from the general public or made up of key informants. The most comprehensive findings result when you use more than one research method and when you survey more than one group of people. To find out which family planning programs are most needed in a community it would be ideal to survey professional (doctors, educators, community workers, clergy) as well as users from the public (parents, teens, young marrieds). With the first group a person-to-person approach might be used and with the second, a mail-out questionnaire. Not only would this give a broad community base of response, but it would provide a comparison between the professional perception of need and the perceptions of the public.

It is useful to look at these two groups and at advantages and disadvantages resulting from choosing either or both of them as target groups.

a. Surveying key informants

Important information about community needs can be obtained from persons who, by virtue of their position in the community, have the ability or the responsibility to speak for and to the people. These key informants are likely to be public officials, doctors, teachers, social workers, clergy, nurses, members of Boards, prominent business or community leaders and so on. The phrase "key informants" refers to the people to be surveyed rather than to any particular survey method.

In addition to providing information and judgments about needs, the counsel and advice of a large number of "experts" is obtained. Key informants can often indicate which problem areas are likely to become public issues leading to reaction from the community. As

well, this type of survey shows where politicians and leaders might offer or withold support.

The following chart outlines advantages and disadvantages of using key informants in a survey.

FIG. 7 Advantages and Disadvantages of Surveying Key Informants

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Simple design and relatively low cost.	1) Depends on the cooperation of individuals who may view community family planning needs from their own perspective.
2) Provides structures to bring together key personnel to discuss family planning issues.	2) Vested interests may prevent open, honest consideration of family planning programs (competing for dollars, discomfort with subject of sexuality).
3) Lines of communication between agencies are often established or strengthened.	3) Potential for conflict and divisiveness exists.
4) Encourages a multi-organizational effort toward family planning.	4) Key informants are not truly "representative" of the community's population. These are usually people of a certain educational and/or income level and may not represent the very old, or teens, or women, or the poor, or ethnic minorities. When this happens, the greatest needs may go unrecognized and therefore unfulfilled.
5) Educates and informs key people from the community about family planning.	
6) May generate local support and/or advisory groups to help with family planning programs.	

A survey of key informants has an important place in research needs and, combined with an approach that involves the wider public, should be given a high priority.

b. Surveying the general public

The fact that citizens of a community are potential users of a service and that they, as taxpayers, provide the financial backing for programs, are two reasons why they might be chosen as a target group for a needs assessment. In most cases, it is not possible to survey a total population and some form of sampling procedure needs to be employed (see Chapter IV).

Whether they are surveyed by mail, telephone, in person or at a forum, the general public will include the young and the old, professionals and lay persons, the wealthy and the poor, newcomers and old-timers, and so on.

There are disadvantages to a general survey as well and the following chart may provide a useful overview.

FIG. 8 Advantages and Disadvantages of Surveying the General Public

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Provides direct input from residents of a community.	1) May include information from people who have little knowledge of the family planning field.
2) May foster "grass roots" support.	2) May trigger opposition.
3) Provides an opportunity to educate and inform.	3) May provide a focus for opposing factions to mobilize around.
4) May generate advisory or support groups from the community.	4) May mask or distort existing need. (For example, in a community where there is a large elderly population, the results may show little need thereby masking a serious problem in a younger, but numerically smaller, age group).
5) May generate information not known to professionals or "key respondents".	
6) Potentially provides data that is truly representative of community needs and perceptions.	

The foregoing illustrates that using the general population as a target group needs to be approached with careful consideration.

In summary, a target population can be determined by some or all of the following:

a. Objectives of the survey,
b. Resources (money, time, personnel)
c. Secondary gains desired
d. Nature of the community to be surveyed
e. Individual preferences/skills
f. Political implications

CHAPTER II: SECTION E

Identifying Survey Questions

One of the most important planning steps is to identify what questions will yield the needed information. By now broad objectives will have been determined and the target population identified. Still, there may be some discrepancy among different people's views of what needs to be asked. Which of these questions describes the needs you wish to assess? Which fit in with your objectives?

- Which family planning services are most needed in our community?
- How can existing family planning programs be improved?
- Which population groups are in need of family planning services?
- Who should be providing family planning services?
- What are people's attitudes to family planning services in this community?
- What are the main barriers standing in the way of family planning services in this community?

It can be seen that the needs assessment process would be different for each question and that the resulting information would have different implications in each case.

In deciding on the questions to be asked, it's very useful to involve some of the people who will be later working with the results. When a particular question is answered, will family planning staff, administrators, doctors, social workers, and/or educators be able to use the information? Each question under consideration should be tested in this way and refined until there is consensus that the needed information will be generated.

Getting input from a variety of people will likely reveal different, sometimes contradictory, perceptions. The process of dealing with these various points of view about family planning, research methods, community needs, etc. will help to clarify issues and may raise important points that may otherwise have been missed.

It is possible that the research will stop here. Perhaps, in identifying central questions, the group will realize that their objectives can be met in other ways or are unrealistic at this time. If the decision is made to

continue, there must be commitment. Therefore consideration needs to be given to possible outcomes and side effects as well as a realistic look taken at whether or not the needs assessment information will be used.

CHAPTER III - OUTLINE

CHOOSING THE RESEARCH METHOD(S)

A. Surveys

1. Community Surveys
2. Delphi Technique

B. Group Forums

1. Nominal Group Technique
2. Community Forums

Appendix

CHAPTER III. CHOOSING THE RESEARCH METHOD(S)

CHAPTER III: SECTION A

Surveys

This chapter will deal with needs assessment survey methodology. As mentioned earlier, it is recommended that, wherever possible, two or more methods be used in combination. In each case, a description will be followed by advantages and disadvantages. More detail about procedures can be found in the Appendix at the end of this chapter

1. Community Surveys

   In surveying communities, there are three commonly used methods of asking people for information: (1) Mailed Questionnaires; (2) Person-to-Person Interviews; and (3) Telephone Surveys. All of these can be used to survey professionals or other "key" target groups as well as the general population or "the public".

   It might be useful to examine some advantages and disadvantages of each.

See: Figure 9, page 35
Figure 10, page 36
Figure 11, page 37

FIG. 9 Mailed Questionnaires - Advantages and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Easy to contact people of different ages, living in different parts of the community, speaking different languages.	1) Frighten some people who associate print material with legal documents or government papers.
2) Enable respondents to rank or priorize several alternatives.	2) People may have trouble reading the questions or writing the answers.
3) Allow the use of sketches, photos and/or provocative statements to generate a reaction.	3) May be difficult to get up-to-date addresses and mailing lists.
4) Give Answers to specific questions	4) Difficult to predict or control how many questionnaires will actually be returned or when.
5) Take relatively less of the researcher's time than interviews or telephone surveys.	5) There is no guarantee about who, at a given address, will fill out the questionnaire.
6) Least expensive of the three methods.	6) Require workers for typing, stuffing envelopes, collecting returns, doing follow-ups.
7) Can be done across long distances without appreciably increasing the costs.	7) Provide no opportunity for clarifying or expanding on answers.
8) Because they are filled out by the respondent (self-administered) they provide for individual, personal, anonymous input.	

FIG. 10 Person-to-Person Interviews - Advantages and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Personal conversation can follow particular interests and concerns in detail.	1) Locating people and setting up appointments takes time.
2) Interviewer can "probe" to elicit more information.	2) Where and when you conduct the interview can affect the information you get.
3) Other forms of communication such as facial expression, gestures, body language come into play.	3) Size of the sample may be limited because of time and staff required to administer and conduct interviews.
4) Enable respondents to rank or priorize items.	4) Cost may be nearly double that of a mail questionnaire.
5) Allow the use of photos, sketches, prepared statements.	5) May involve recruitment, training, and supervision of interviewers.
6) Provide answers to specific questions.	6) Interviewers may not be willing to work nights and weekends.
7) Useful for people who have trouble with reading and writing.	7) Success depends very much on skill of the interviewer.
8) Reduces the problem of low response rate.	8) May be discrepancies among different interviewers in the way questions are presented and interpreted.

FIG. 11 Telephone Surveys - Advantages and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Easy to contact people of different ages, from different areas, speaking different languages.	1) Very difficult to have respondents rank or priorize a list of several possible answers.
2) Provide answers to specific questions.	2) Photographs, sketches, etc. used to generate a response cannot be employed.
3) Useful for people who have trouble with reading and writing.	3) May be difficult to get up-to-date lists of telephone numbers.
4) May require fewer staff and less time than person-to-person or mailed surveys.	4) May require several calls before the person is reached.
5) Involve no travelling.	5) Does not include people with no phone or those with unlisted numbers (may be a significant percentage in some cities).
	6) Respondent might be busy or preoccupied and may not really pay attention to questions being asked.
	7) Involve hidden costs of time to develop questions, test them, train interviewers, summarize results, and write reports (telephone interviewers take about 2.2 calls to obtain an interview and, if they are being paid by the hour, costs can mount).
	8) Costs roughly 10%-15% more than a mail questionnaire unless volunteers are used.

9) Results may be affected by the skill or manner of the interviewer.
10) May annoy people who dislike being surveyed by phone.

It can be seen that all methods have certain strengths and weaknesses. Most logically, the approach selected should be the one which best meets the needs of those doing the research. The chart on the following page provides a summary comparison of different survey techniques.

Actual questionnaire design and interviewing technique are discussed in Chapter IV.

FIG. 12 IF A SURVEY IS TO BE DONE, WHAT TYPE IS BEST?

	Face to Face Interviews	Telephone Survey	Mailed Questionnaires
1. Type of Information			
If you have:			
. A complicated series of questions to ask	Yes	No	Sometimes
. Many open questions to ask	Yes	Possibly	Rarely
. Many alternatives to be considered or rated	Possibly	Rarely	Yes
Do you need to know:			
. Responses to very specific questions	Yes	Yes	Yes
. Deeper attitudes and feelings	Yes	Rarely	No
2. Sample			
Do you need:			
. Answers from specific people who might not respond themselves (they might give the task of responding to someone else in their organization)	Yes	Yes	No
. Answers from specific people who are likely to respond	Yes	Yes	Yes
. Answers from a lot of people	No	Possibly	Yes
Do you have:			
. People who will not understand print	Yes	Possibly	No
. People who will not want anyone to know what they think	Rarely	No	Yes
. People who speak other languages	Possibly	Possibly	Possibly
3. Time			
If you lack:			
. Trained interviewers or the time to train people	Never	No	Yes
. Time to code responses or people to do it for you	Never	Rarely	Rarely
. Time to think about the research you are doing	NEVER	NEVER	NEVER

(Taken from: Enjoying Research?, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation)

2. Delphi Technique

The Delphi Technique is a group process which uses written responses as opposed to bringing individuals together. Named after the forecaster, the Oracle of Appollo at Delphi, this method is basically a series of mailed questionnaires sent to a number of experts, users, administrators or any group who cannot come together physically. For this reason, it is particularly useful where survey respondents are separated by distance. The Delphi technique systematically collects information and judgements from a group of people until a collective agreement has been reached or enough information has been gathered.

FIG. 13 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Delphi Technique

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Since it is mailed, the format makes possible a wide geographical outreach.	1) Adequate time is required. Most Delphi studies take more than a month to carry out and a good rule of thumb is 45-60 days.
2) Large numbers of respondents can be be handled with limited manpower.	2) Participants must have skill in written communication.
3) Respondents remain anonymous to each other thereby preserving confidentiality, and encouraging frankness. Competition is avoided as are status pressures and pressures to conform.	3) Participants must be highly motivated to answer questionnaires, to provide information, and to return questionnaires on time.
4) Adequate time for thinking and reflection is provided.	
5) Process remains problem-centred.	
6) Facilitators avoid making premature choices.	
7) Respondents have flexibility in choosing a convenient time to respond.	
8) No travel time is required.	

Instructions for carrying out a Delphi study can be found in Appendix A at the end of this chapter.

CHAPTER III: Section B

Group Forums

Whereas surveys usually deal with respondents on an individual basis, group forums seek to bring people together for purposes of discussion and sharing of ideas. Those involved can be either key informants or members from the public at large.

1. Nominal Group Technique

Andre Delbecq and Andrew Van de Ven, who developed this technique, provide evidence that nominal groups can generate twice as many ideas as conventional groups. The word "nominal" refers to the non-verbal aspect of this approach.

Nominal group technique can be used by small or large groups to generate and priorize a large number of ideas/answers in around 2 hours. In each group, a creative atmosphere is generated that allows for conflicting and incompatible ideas to be brought out in writing. Domination by forceful individuals is minimized and hidden agendas are basically eliminated. The outcome has a sense of group decision since all members have an equal chance to participate.

This method could be used in the following ways:

- For determining objectives by a core/advisory group.
- For establishing priorities by a large group (interagency meeting, community forum).
- For establishing priorities by several groups in different locations (sub-offices of Health Units, staff and students from different schools, key informants from different communities, parent groups, medical associations).

Advantages and disadvantages of this method are summarized in the chart below.

FIG. 14 Nominal Group Technique - Advantages and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Allows each participant equal opportunity to present ideas.	1) Requires skillful group facilitator familiar with method.
2) Brings out conflicing and/or incompatible ideas.	2) May not appeal to those who prefer a more free-flowing approach to generating ideas and discussion.
3) Allows participants "quiet time" to reflect and ponder.	
4) Minimizes criticism and judging of others' ideas.	
5) Minimizes competition and domination by forceful members.	
6) Requires small amount of time - 2 to 4 hours.	
7) Adaptable to small or large groups.	

Please refer to Appendix B at the end of this chapter for instructions on carrying out Nominal Group Technique.

2. Community Forums

One method that can involve large numbers of people of diverse backgrounds is the community/public forum. Typically, such an event would be held in a public place such as a hall, school gym, church, etc. and would be open to all.

The success of a community forum depends a great deal on attracting large numbers of people, therefore advertising is very important. Consider local newspaper, radio and T.V. advertising, leaflets sent home with school children or distributed by mail, posters and signs, etc. Some thought should be given to how large an area needs to be covered - one school area, an entire health unit, one town or city?

Chairing the meeting is a key responsibility. Someone who has the skills and who has community respect/acceptance would be best. Perhaps more than one person can share the task.

Structure and agenda for the meeting are probably most important of all. Planning ahead of time helps to keep the evening on topic and productive. Organizers should have a clear idea of the objectives of the forum. The following are three suggestions as to how a community forum can be handled.

a. The facilitator can ask predetermined questions, open them up for general discussion, and then record answers on a blackboard or flipchart. Guiding the discussion is important here in order to deal with heckling or interference by special interest groups or a non-communicative audience where little participation is forthcoming. It is important to hear as many people as possible and it may be necessary to prevent domination by 1 or 2 forceful speakers.

b. Another idea is distributing question sheets. These questions can serve as a basis for general discussion and provide a written, measurable record of responses. Brief questions, to the point, and not too many of them are best. Therefore, pre-planning is important, with careful consideration given to wording and form (multiple choice, true or false, ranking, written answers).

c. Nominal Group Technique can also be used with a community forum. It takes somewhat more planning and would require several people to guide the process but may be best because of the advantages described earlier.

A location for a community forum needs to be arranged and the cost considered. It may be possible to find free or cheap space (church hall, school gym, donated business space) or there may be funds budgeted or available. While it is difficult to predict the number of participants, an estimate needs to be made about how much space will be needed.

Reporting the results of a forum may be wise. You may decide to publicly thank those who participated. There may be a public relations advantage in reporting a large, enthusiastic attendance and so on.

For advantages and disadvantages of community forums please refer to the following chart.

FIG. 15 Community Forum - Advantages and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Provides information, seeks information, and provides publicity all at the same time.	1) Number of respondents unpredictable.
2) May be appealing in that it seeks to equally involve everyone in a community.	2) Does not provide a scientific sample.
3) May generate new ideas and raise issues not thought of before.	3) May not generate needed information.
4) May foster "grass roots" support for family planning services.	4) Meeting may be difficult to guide/control.
5) May generate local support/advisory groups to help with family planning programs.	5) May be costly in the long run if people don't show up and arrangements have been made in vain.
6) May foster co-operation among individuals, groups, agencies, etc.	6) Arrangements may be difficult to make.
7) May be less costly than other survey methods.	7) Meeting may be side-tracked or dominated by forceful or "special interest" groups.
8) Takes less time than other surveys.	

Community forums offer to involve people from the community, provide an opportunity to get group reaction and involvement and can be a useful way of getting information about family planning needs.

CHAPTER III

APPENDIX A: Delphi Technique

APPENDIX B Nominal Group Technique

APPENDIX A

DELPHI TECHNIQUE

The following describes the procedure to be followed in facilitating the Delphi process.

1. Develop the Delphi questions. This is the key to the process and forms the basis of the broad issue that the survey is dealing with. What information is needed from this survey that we don't now have? How will results from the Delphi be used?
   In terms of family planning, some questions might be: (1) List, in order of priority, which family planning services you think are important? (2) Which age groups (population groups) are most in need of family planning services? (3) Which institutions, groups, or individuals should be providing family planning services? The idea is to generate several answers for each question so that succeeding questionnaires can enable respondents to refine their choices.

2. Select and contact respondents. Individuals selected must be knowledable about family planning and feel personally involved with family planning issues. Ideally, they will be able to handle the written format and be motivated enough to answer questionnaires. An important motivation point is that the respondents will have impact on a field that affects them directly.
   Usually, the planners nominate from 15 to 30 participants (there is an element of "flattery" in being nominated). These could include "experts" such as family planning educators from the whole province or doctors and other professionals who deal in any way with family planning in the community. Or the target group might be "users" such as high school students or parents of a particular age group or school district. To use the Delphi technique with a large group such as students or parents, a representative random sample would need to be selected.
   Although experience shows that few new ideas are generated once the group size exceeds 30 well-chosen participants, a much larger group might be chosen for purposes of increasing group understanding, gaining support and motivating.

Each nominee is contacted (preferably by phone or in person) and asked whether he/she is willing to participate in the survey. An explanation of purposes, procedure, and reporting of results will be necessary.

3. Develop the first questionnaire. This is the first mailing that goes out to participants after they have agreed to become involved in the process. A covering letter provides background information and should include: (1) thanking the individual for participating (2) explaining why the information is needed (3) explaining how the results of the Delphi will be used and (4) providing instructions and a response deadline. The following sample letter might serve as a guide.

> Dear ___:
>
> Thank you for agreeing to participate in our survey regarding family planning needs. Your contribution will be most valuable in guiding us to develop programs and services for the people of our community.
>
> In particular, we need help in identifying and priorizing what family planning services are needed, which groups need them, and who should provide the services.
>
> The results of this survey will be used by our Health Unit to establish programs and services, perhaps in cooperation with other providers. Also, each of you will receive a summary of our findings and information about future plans based on the findings.
>
> Attached is the first in the series of questionnaires (there will be two others). Please complete this form and return it to us by ___(date)___. Again, thanks for your help.
>
> Sincerely,

The best questions follow an open-ended format that allows the respondent plenty of scope to provide information. A two-week deadline is usually allowed. The following points are important in making the first questionnaire a success:

1) Be sure that both the letter and the questionnaire contain no technical errors. Don't jeopardize your rapport with respondents by misspelling a word or a name.
2) Make the covering letter no more than one page long. The respondents are busy people who will be bored with rhetoric.

3) Send a personally typed rather than a xeroxed letter. You might consider seeking the help of a graphic artist or printer to make the questionnaire visually attractive.
4) Be sure the task instructions are clear.
5) Simplify return of the questionnaire by means of a self-addressed, stamped envelope.
6) Send out the first questionnaire the same day a person agrees to participate, if possible. Delay may cause respondents to lose their enthusiasm for the project. If they receive a letter soon after you call, you will impress upon respondents the sincerity of your interest in their participation.
7) Pretest the questionnaire for clarity and to ensure that it can be filled out in approximately ½ hour.

Even when all the above concerns have been carefully attended to, some participants will not respond unless they receive further encouragement. Two forms of encouragement seem to be successful, and sometimes both may be needed. One is the "reminder letter" to be sent one week after the first questionnaire is sent. Along with reminding respondents of the deadline date, it should also offer to answer any questions by collect telephone contact. For those people who still do not respond, a further step may have to be taken. Respondents are telephoned to see if they are having any problem with the questionnaire, and reminded of how much their input is needed.

When all of the questionnaires are returned, the items are collated into categories that reflect respondent's answers. Because participants will have used different ways and language to present their ideas, an important task of those carrying out the survey is to summarize the answers into categories without being repetitious but without losing any of the ideas. For example, in answering the question "What family planning services are most needed in the community?" responses might include "talking to teenagers about sexual issues," "helping married people with infertility problems," "providing confidential advice to people." All of these could be categorized under "Counselling" with perhaps a breakdown into specific age groups.

4. Develop the second questionnaire. It is important that items in Questionnaire #2 accurately convey the meanings provided by answers to Questionnaire #1. The second questionnaire asks participants to review the items identified in the first, argue in favor or against those items, and clarify items. It also asks participants to rank items to establish preliminary priorities. Questionnaire #2 seeks to:

   - identify areas of disagreement
   - identify areas of agreement
   - identify and discuss items needing clarification
   - provide an early understanding of priorities

   In order to meet the above requirements, Questionnaire #2 should make it easy to identify and relate to the items taken from Questionnaire #1. It should also make it easy to add comments of agreement, disagreement, or clarification. And it, too, should be short enough to complete within ½ hour.

   Again, a covering letter is included thanking the respondent for the help given so far and setting out a clear task statement. Participants are asked to do three things: (1) review the list of items and comment on them; (2) vote for the most important items; and (3) return the questionnaire by a certain date.

   Sample:

   A. Instructions: The responses from Questionnaire #1 resulted in 23 items which have been condensed into 10 categories of family planning service. Please choose the five most important services and rank them: 5 = most important; 1 = least important. Also, please add your comments about any of the ten items.

B. Services (List of 10 items) Rank Comment

1. Birth control clinical services
2. Birth control counselling services
3. Sexuality workshops for parents
4. Birth control information telephone line
5. etc.

Again, include a self-addressed envelope and set a two week deadline. It is helpful to say something about how well the study is proceeding ("over 90 percent of the participants responded to Questionnaire #1") and to review the original Delphi purpose. A "reminder" letter after one week and/or phone calls to those who do not respond may be necessary. Above all, mail questionnaires on schedule so that people don't have a chance to forget that they are part of an important study.

5. Develop the third questionnaire. When the results of the second questionnaire are all in, a summary sheet is prepared to record the findings. It would look something like this:

Item	No. of Respondents Voting for Item	Individual Ranks	Total Vote
1.	6	8-6-8-5-8-6	41
2.	7	10-9-10-9-6-9-10	63
3.	3	10-9-10	29

This tally sheet permits the needs assessment group to see (1) the number of people voting for an item; (2) the diversity of rankings assigned to an item; and (3) total vote scores for each item. Comments must also be summarized into one line or a short paragraph for each item. Questionnaire #3 might then look something like this:

Item	Preliminary Vote Results	Final Vote Requested	Summary of Earlier Comments
1.	41		Respondents generally felt that clinic should be located in the hospital and be open some evenings.
2.	63		Respondents generally indicated that teens and single mothers were prime target groups for the service.
3.	29		Respondents felt that these workshops should be held in different areas so that people do not have far to travel and that they should be held in the evening or on weekends.

A space at the bottom can invite further comments or another column can be added.

Before Questionnaire #3 is sent out, the work group must decide if the hoped-for information is being provided. At this point it is not too late to modify the questionnaire or to add another question or two. For example, if the comments and information being received are too specific, reclassification under broader headings is possible. Similarly, if answers are too general, categories can be broken down into more specific items. A question to ask is: "If Questionnaire #2 were the final one what decisions would we make and why? What is valuable or troublesome about responses so far?"

The original purpose of the Delphi study was to obtain consensus on several issues. So far, issues have been identified (Questionnaire #1), clarifications, supportive statements, and criticisms made (Questionnaire #2), and a preliminary indication of priorities obtained through rankings. This final questionnaire provides closure and permits the participants to review prior responses and express their individual judgments as to the importance of each item.

(The number of Delphi questionnaires may vary from 3 to 5, depending on the degree of agreement and amount of additional information being sought or obtained.)

The mechanics of Questionnaire #3 are the same as earlier. An appropriate covering letter and a self-addressed, stamped envelope should be included in the mailing.

6. Analyze final results and prepare a report. Results are analyzed and collated following the same procedure as with Questionnaire #2. Particular care should be taken to ensure clarity of the final statement so that people who did not participate in the study are able to understand it. The final report provides important feedback to participants and work group members alike. It may also have relevance for other decision-makers, community leaders, etc. It should summarize the goals and the process followed as well as the results. It may form the basis for a position paper or a proposal for funding or a brief to government.

APPENDIX B

NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

The Nominal Group process is a structured group meeting conducted by a leader or facilitator. Anyone wanting to use this method should proceed as follows:

1. Arrange participants into groups of 5-7 members, sitting around a table in full view of one another, supplied with writing materials. Have each group select a recorder from among group members.

2. Pose a single question to the group. It is best if the question can be posted on a flip chart or blackboard or written at the top of each participant's paper.
   For planning purposes, the question could be something like "What information needs to be gathered by a family planning needs assessment?" The idea is to get as much information, as many suggestions as possible from the participants.

3. Have the participants of each group write down their responses - without talking, in absolute silence.
   Enforcing the "no talking" rule is the responsibility of the facilitator/leader. This enables members to reflect carefully upon their ideas, to be motivated by others writing independently and silently, to be involved in a competition - free atmosphere and to generate as many ideas as possible without being interrupted or influenced. Allow up to 15 minutes.

4. After 10-15 minutes of work, each member, in round-robin fashion, presents one idea from his/her list. Each response is numbered (1, 2, 3 etc.). No discussion is allowed as each participant in turn presents an idea to the recorder to be written on a flip chart. This same process is repeated for a second, then a third time, etc. until all the answers have been recorded.

5. Clarify the meaning of the responses. Take some time to ask whether the responses are clearly understood. In the event that there are great

similarities between certain answers the group could decide to combine them and reduce the total number on the list. However, this is not the time for arguing, or evaluating or lobbying - clarification is the goal.

6. Preliminary voting. The group now returns to the silent process of priorizing the list of responses. Each member is instructed to rank, for example the top 7 items (7 points for the most important item and so on) from the long list on the flipchart. (A guideline is that group members can priorize only 5 to 9 items with any reliability). When all members have ranked their top priority items individually, they are recorded, once again in round-robin fashion, by the leader. The item with the greatest numerical total represents the top priority answer.

7. Discuss the vote. Are further explanations required? What do the high vote-getters and the low vote-getters mean? Should certain items be redefined?

8. Conduct a final vote. Based on discussion, changes, and refinements, a final vote can be conducted. It is possible that priorities need to be narrowed down further or that some items were changed or combined as a result of discussion.

9. Calculate the total vote. If more than one group of 5-7 people was involved, a grand total must be calculated. Items from all groups are arranged into similar categories and numerical values assigned to each category to determine total group priorities.

CHAPTER IV - OUTLINE

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

A. Sampling Methods

1. Random sampling
2. Reputational sample
3. Stratified sample
4. Quota sampling
5. Cluster sampling
6. Accidental sampling

B. Types of Questions

1. Open questions
2. Closed questions

C. Problem Areas in Question Writing

1. Loaded words/phrases/categories
2. Making assumptions
3. Vagueness
4. Complicated questions
5. Offensive or threatening questions
6. Staying on topic

D. Guidelines for Question Writing

E. Covering Letter

CHAPTER IV. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Once you have set clear objectives, decided on how the needs assessment will be co-ordinated, identified your target population, and determined the overall questions to be asked, you will need to consider how many people to survey. If the target group is fairly small it might be possible to survey everyone. If you are doing a larger population survey you will need to use a sampling method from which you can make generalizations.

CHAPTER IV: SECTION A

Sampling Methods

The following brief descriptions of sample types may help you decide.

1. Random sampling

   Each person in a population has an equal chance of being included in a random sample. In dealing with a rather small number of names you could put all the names in a hat and draw out, at random, as many as you require. (You might do this with a list of community doctors or school staff members or public health nurses).

   For larger numbers, first divide your total list of people (say 500) by the size of the sample you need (let's say 55). The result is 9.05 which means that you would interview every 9th person on the list until you have 55. You should start counting at a random point in the list and when you get to the bottom, go back to the beginning and keep counting. There are also Tables of Random Numbers, usually found in the appendicies of textbooks on research methodology or statistical methods, available from government sources, schools and University research departments.

2. Reputational sample

   Reputational sampling is used quite frequently and involves selecting individuals who are deemed to be "typical" representatives of their community. These respondents are not necessarily experts or professionals as in a Key Informant Survey. They may be leaders of parent groups, presidents of organizations, or chairmen of certain boards and can

provide very useful and legitimate information. However, it should be remembered that this is not really a representative sampling method in that one cannot make the assumption that these respondents truly represent the population they come from.

3. Stratified sample

A stratified sample represents segments or subgroups of a population. For example, in a family planning survey, it might be most useful to survey teens as a sub-group as well as parents of preschool children. In order for this method to be accurate, the number of people surveyed in any segment should be in proportion to their numbers in the general population. For example, if you are surveying 500 people and you have determined (from public records) that teens make up 10% of the population, 50 teenagers (selected at random) would make up that strata of your total sample.

4. Quota sampling

When you have limited resources and must restrict yourself to a small number of respondents, quota sampling may be used. Using the situation described in 3 above, assume that you could interview only 50 people in all. The interviewer would proceed, interviewing households until he/she had encountered and surveyed 5 teen-agers (10%). This method provides a "quick reading" but may be subject to a large margin of error because true random sampling methods have not been followed.

5. Cluster sampling

Cluster sampling is a method used when the population is spread out over a large geographic area and when there is a need to observe people directly. It involves steps like dividing a community into certain areas and surveying only residents in those selected areas. Locations are randomly chosen and then respondents are interviewed at random. The services of a consultant are required with cluster sampling.

6. Accidental sample

Accidental sample is the weakest method but is the easiest to do. There is a great potential for bias. "Man-in-the-street" interviews are included here as are simple door-to-door interviews with no planning or pre-selection.

Once you have decided on a sampling procedure, a questionnaire is developed to elicit the required information. Different types of questions can be asked and for anyone planning to conduct a survey, its important to consider which questioning format will best provide the information needed.

Ethics of Research

Important considerations are:

a) voluntary participation.

b) anonymity - when the researcher cannot identify a given response with a given respondent.

c) confidentiality - when the researcher is able to identify a given person's responses but promises she will not.

If anonymity or confidentiality is assured then steps should be taken such as no names on questionnaires.

Also, there should be an awareness of inferred identity - this may be a concern in rural health units, if there is only one doctor and this is identified in the responses as this would be neither anonymous or confidential.

d) identification of purpose and sponsor - almost any specification of purpose and/or sponsor will have some effect on completion rate and responses, however, ethically the respondent should be informed for ethical reasons.

CHAPTER IV: SECTION B

Types of Questions

Generally speaking, there are two types of questions: open and closed.

1. Open questions

Open questions encourage a free flow in the response and do not seek to limit or guide the answer. Within a general topic the respondent is usually asked to use his/her own words.

Examples:

* If you were to plan a family planning service for this community what kinds of things would you include?
* In what ways could the family planning resource centre be improved?

An attempt is made to invite the respondent to explore problem areas, express opinions, and suggest solutions without being given any particular point of view to begin with.
Sometimes both sides of an issue are described and respondents are asked to comment or give an opinion or choose one of the alternatives.

Example:
Plans are under way to expand Family Planning Services in our Health Unit. Two general programs are being considered. Program I would develop a Resource Centre offering books, pamphlets, films etc. to the general public and Program II would set up a Counselling Service offering confidential, one-to-one counselling services. An overview of each program is attached for your information.

* What do you think are the advantages of Program I?
* What do you think are the disadvantages of Program I?
* What do you think are the advantages of Program II?
* What do you think are the disadvantages of Program II?

* Which one would you personally like to see used?
* Why?
* Further comments.

Note that the questions should be balanced among the alternatives otherwise the response will be biased.
Open questions can also be used to clarify meanings or to find out how people understand certain terms.

Example:

. What does the term "family planning services" mean to you?
. What kinds of information should be available at the Family Planning Resource Centre?

It can be seen that a great deal of information can be gathered from open questions. It is useful to look at advantages and disadvantages of their use.

FIG. 16 Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Open Questions

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Can show who knows what.	1) Require more time and effort on the part of the respondent than do closed questions.
2) Provide leads from users.	2) May not be suitable for respondents who have trouble with writing.
3) Illuminate problems as well as strong points.	3) Take longer to read, analyze, and summarize than closed questions.
4) Unearth complaints and frustrations as well as satisfaction and approval.	4) Information may be unpredictable or general in nature.
5) Provide respondents with an opportunity to provide opinions in their own way.	5) Difficult to categorize and collate results.
6) Give respondents an opportunity to provide input to decision making and program planning.	

2. Closed questions

Closed questions provide certain categories from which respondents are asked to make choices.

Examples:

. Are you in favor of expanding Family Planning Services in this community?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Uncertain

. What age are you?

1. Under 12 years
2. 13 years - 19 years
3. 20 years - 35 years
4. Over 36 years

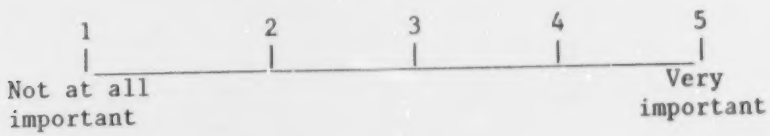
. In your practice, how many requests for birth control information do you get in an average month?

1. Less than 3
2. Between 4 and 9
3. Between 10 and 15
4. More than 16

. Education for teens about birth control and sexual behavior is important.

1. Strongly agree		1. Strongly agree
2. Agree		2. Agree
3. Uncertain	OR	3. Disagree
4. Disagree		4. Strongly disagree
5. Strongly disagree		5. Don't know

. How important is it to have courses for helping parents to communicate with teenagers about sexual matters?



. The following are some services now offered by our family planning program. Please rank them in order of importance, with 10 being most important, 9 next important and so on with 1 being least important of all.

_____ birth control information
_____ anatomy and physiology information
_____ counselling
_____ consultation to other professionals
_____ community education
_____ pregnancy testing
_____ venereal disease information
_____ infertility information
_____ decision-making about parenting
_____ other (please specify)

. In your opinion, who should be providing family planning services in our Health Unit? (Check one or more)

_____ specially trained family planning staff
_____ public health nurses
_____ doctors
_____ teachers
_____ parents
_____ clergy
_____ social workers
_____ other (please specify)

Closed type quesions have an important place in most questionnaires. There are advantages and disadvantages to their use.

FIG. 17 Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Closed Questions

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1) Easy to read, analyze, summarize.	1) May influence and/or limit responses.
2) Require less time and effort on the part of the respondent than open questions.	2) May inhibit spontaneity and free flow of ideas.
3) Provide specific, categorized information.	3) May mask problems as well as strong points.
4) Easily adapted to statistics, graphs, etc.	4) Provide little avenue for expressions of complaint or approval.
5) Provide direction and control over information provided - keep respondents "on track".	
6) Useful with respondents who are uncomfortable with writing things down.	

In the final analysis, most good questionnaires use a combination of open and closed questions.

CHAPTER IV: SECTION C

Problem Areas in Question-Writing

The wording and format of a questionnaire, whether it is used as a mail-out or to form the basis of face-to-face or telephone interviews, will probably be the single most important factor influencing the results of a survey. There are some key danger areas to be avoided.

1. Loaded words/phrases/categories

The response that a person gives to a question can be affected by his/her reaction to "loaded" words or formats. How do you think answers would differ to the following questions, both asking for the same information?

Example: Doctors recommend that teenagers should have access to birth control information.

_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ undecided
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

Teenagers should have access to birth control information.

_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ undecided
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

Some people will "agree" more in the first question if they consider doctors as authorities that they wish to align with. Or else they may "disagree" if they have a fear or mistrust of doctors The second question is much more likely to elicit a clear answer based on the respondent's own perceptions.

There are many words in the family planning field that are "loaded" with embarrassment or fear. Words such as "abortion", "homosexuality", etc. may trigger responses unrelated to the information being sought.

Another way of influencing an answer is in the arrangement of response categories.

Examples:

Birth control information programs should be:

1. ____ decreased
2. ____ kept the same
3. ____ increased slightly
4. ____ increased a lot.

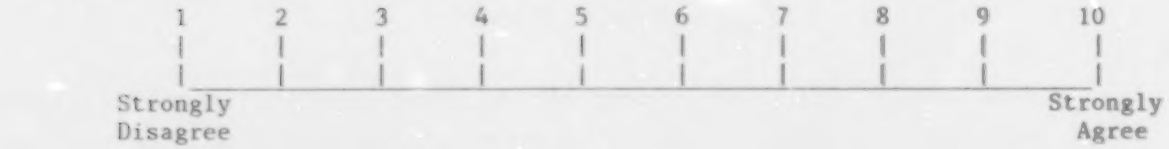
The above question is unbalanced because 1. is outweighed by numbers 3. and 4. A better arrangement would be:

Birth control information programs should be:

1. ____ decreased greatly
2. ____ decreased slightly
3. ____ kept the same
4. ____ increased slightly
5. ____ increased greatly

Sometimes questions are worded in such a way as to "invite" a certain response.

Example: Most mature adults are knowledgeable about birth control methods.



Anyone disagreeing with the statement might also be admitting to not being a mature adult.

Example: Are you in favor of reducing teen pregnancies?

This question would be of little value since it is unlikely that anyone would vote against this issue.

2. Making assumptions

Some questions presume certain knowledge and tend to "box in" the respondent.

Example: Which family planning services are most valuable?

Without providing an explanation or description of services beforehand, or at least presenting options to choose from, the respondent can be made to feel confused or stupid if he/she has incomplete knowledge of the family planning field.

Example: Which of the following sources do you use to find out information about family planning and sexuality?

_____ Books
_____ Magazines
_____ Doctor
_____ Friends

In the above example an assumption is made that these are the only sources of information. The likelihood of missing important information is great, in addition to the fact that the respondent is asked for information but then prevented from answering fully. Including a category labelled "other" is used often as a way of obtaining information that may not have occurred to the surveyor. Or else a better way of wording that question would be:

Example: In your experience, how do people find out information about family planning and sexuality?

In fact, an entire questionnaire or survey may be based on assumptions of one kind or another. If there is no family planning service in an area, a survey seeking to find out which programs are needed makes the assumption that some programs are needed. Perhaps it would be more realistic to ask, "In your opinion, is there a need for a family planning services in this community?" Another type of assumption is made when professionals are surveyed and their responses are taken to represent the opinions of the community as a whole. Although information from professionals may be very important, as a group they differ markedly from the general population in matters of income levels, education, and lifestyles - not to mention any vested interests they may have. It may be more valid to survey both professionals and the general public and then address areas of common need.

Other assumptions can be made. If a decision is made to exclude senior citizens from a family planning needs assessment, what assumptions are being made?

Assumptions can be deceptively easy to make and are a potential pitfall for people who have strong involvement with a subject and therefore may lack objectivity. Pre-testing a questionnaire and trying out questions on people not closely involved with the process, are ways of getting important feedback to prevent potential problems in this area.

3. Vagueness

Striking a balance between asking open questions that are non-directive and trying to get specific information is a tricky business. Consider this question.

Example: How often have you needed family planning/sexuality information in the last year?

_____ Never
_____ Sometimes
_____ Often
_____ Always

The responses here provide little useful information. And does "you" mean the individual or the family and so on. A better form might be:

During 1983, how many times have you personally needed information about family planning/sexuality?

_____ Never
_____ Less than 2 times
_____ 3 or 4 times
_____ More than 4 times

This question zeroes in on who needs information and how often in a given time period.

When dealing with time periods it is best to try to be specific.
"1983" instead of "last year"
"April and May" instead of "in the spring"
"Between 6 and 9 p.m." instead of "in the evening"
"Never" or "once a year" rather than "rarely".

4. Complicated questions

Try to avoid asking people what they cannot reasonably be expected to know or remember. Can you remember what you had for breakfast a week ago today? Consider this question from a survey of doctors:

> How many requests about infertility have you received from your patients in the last year?

In order to answer with any accuracy, the doctor might have to check patient records, consult with his staff, etc. And even if the answer was forthcoming, of what use would it be to the researcher, or anyone else? What you really want to ask might be:

> Do you think that people in this community need information about infertility?
>
> If yes, what would be the best ways of providing such information?

You would now have some real information about potential need for services from your respondent.

Sometimes questions are detailed, complex, and mentally taxing. Respondents may react negatively to such demands and give up or insert any answer that fills up the space. Long checklists are troublesome as are

questions that require ranking of more than 10 items. In cases where "mental fatigue" sets in the number of "no response" and "don't know" answers increases.

5. Offensive or threatening questions

Some questions are seen to be an invasion of privacy or ask for information that the respondent would rather not disclose. The reaction to this is often a "no" answer or a dishonest one.

Because of the sensitivity surrounding sexual issues, this consideration is especially important in family planning surveys. Before posing a question it is useful to ask, "Would I be comfortable answering this question? "Does this question raise legal issues?" "Does this question require the respondent to divulge a confidence?"

6. Staying on topic

Above all, it is important to stay on track and to keep questions in line with the objectives of your research. Ask yourself, "Is this nice to know or will it give information that can be used?" and "When we get the answer to this question, what will we do with it?"

The questionnaire is the key to a successful, productive survey (mailed, phone or interview). The process of developing the questionnaire should include draft copies, pre-testing, re-wording and re-writing. Keep asking, "When this question is answered, will we have the information we want?"

CHAPTER IV: SECTION D

Guidelines for Question Writing and Questionnaires Construction

To conclude this section on questionnaire design the following is a list of guidelines and tips to keep in mind.

1. Keep your questions (and language) simple, clear and tailored to your audience. Pre-testing helps.

2. Try as much as possible to maintain a neutral tone. Avoid bias.

3. Guard against set responses. Vary the sequence of answers and vary the types of questions used.

4. Avoid "leading" the respondent to agree or disagree with a certain point of view. A human tendency is to be "nice", agreeable, helpful.

5. Provide introductions and background. An introduction at the beginning of a questionnaire can set the tone and put the respondent at ease as well as providing important factual information.

6. Similarly, lead-ins to specific questions help to keep things in context and aid the respondent in replying knowledgeably and comfortably.

7. Keep your questions appropriate to the purposes of your research. Collect all the information you need but don't ask for information that is not useful.

8. Consider the use of drawings, photos, and pictures to brighten up your questionnaire and/or to provide clarification.

9. If both open and closed questions are to be used about a certain category, the open ones should appear first. This minimizes the danger that the respondent will be influenced by the researcher's suggested alternatives.

10. Avoid overlapping answers. It may lead to confusion to have "inservicing for professionals" in the same list as "consultations" unless the difference (if there is one) is clarified.

11. As much as possible, in closed questions, make sure that all possible responses are included. If in doubt, use the category "other, please specify".

12. In arranging the order of your questions try for a smooth "flow" from introduction through the topic areas to the conclusion. Test out your sequencing before using the questionnaire.

13. The first questions should be relatively easy to answer so that respondents are encouraged and motivated to carry on. The idea is to create early interest and confidence.

14. The questionnaire should require no more than 15-30 minutes to complete.

CHAPTER IV: SECTION E

Covering Letter

First impressions are very important. It would be most unfortunate if the recipient of your questionnaire files it in the garbage or sets it aside permanently. People are more likely to respond (1) if the questionnaire is manageable - not too complex and difficult, requiring not too much time and (2) they are convinced that the survey has value.

A well-designed questionnaire deserves a good covering letter. Generally speaking, such a letter should include the following:

. Greeting (use name rather than "sir/madam" or "householder".

. Information about the study and why it is important.

. Who is involved and how those choices were made.

. What will be done with resulting information.

. What information or benefits there will be for participants.

. Confidentiality - yes or no.

. Signature - personal, not photocopied.

More detailed information about questionnaire development is available in libraries, from government sources and from the sources listed at the end of this manual. Anyone involved with planning a community survey is advised to read more widely about the subject.

CHAPTER V - OUTLINE

GUIDING THE PROCESS AND DEALING WITH RESULTS OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A. Interviewers

1. How many interviewers are needed
2. Recruitment
3. Criteria for selecting interviewers
4. Training for interviewers

B. Staying on Track

1. Supervising interviewers
2. Reminders and follow-up letters
3. Role of advisary committee

C. Data Analysis

1. Computer vs. manual
2. Interpreting the results

D. Reporting the Findings

1. Planning the reporting procedure
2. Methods of reporting
3. To whom will you report?

E. Program Planning Based on Findings

CHAPTER V. GUIDING THE PROCESS AND DEALING WITH RESULTS OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER V: SECTION A

Interviewers

Many of the people involved with a needs assessment will have the skills necessary to initiate and complete the project. Certainly, most family planning/health/social services professionals will have experience with planning, arranging meetings, forming committees, co-ordinating, establishing contacts, writing, etc. Similarly, clerical support staff are able to deal with preparing documents, mailing, and so on.

However, in the case of face-to-face and/or telephone surveys, much of the success of the survey depends on interviewers. Whether paid or volunteer, these people should receive some special training and regular supervision.

1. How many interviewers are needed?

   The number of interviewers needed will depend on: (1) the number of people being surveyed; (2) estimated average time per interview (including travel time, time involved in finding correct addresses, time for repeat trips where people were not home the first time); and (3) deadlines for having the interviews completed.

   Say that 100 people were to be interviewed in one month. The average total time necessary to carry out a 30 minute interview is almost 45 minutes. This means that 75 hours need to be set aside for interviewing ($100 \times 45 \div 60 = 75$) or that one interviewer will need to work full-time for about 10 days or 1/2 time for 20 days and so on. Calculations such as these provide guidelines to how many interviewers are needed for a given time period.

2. Recruitment

Once you know how many interviewers are needed you can consider places to recruit from. College/university students who are studying about research might be eager to participate. Perhaps agency staff have time. STEP or PEP students could be hired or volunteers from the community might be considered.

3. Criteria for selecting interviewers

Interviewers will be representing your needs assessment project and/or your agency in the community. There are certain things to watch for in making selections. Suggested criteria for selecting interviewers are presented in Figure 18. Some of the items will be specific to either telephone or face-to-face surveys.

FIG. 18 Criteria for Selecting Interviewers

1. Should be available evenings and week-ends.
2. Should have access to a car.
3. Should be in good health and able to do a lot of walking, climb stairs, etc.
4. Should present a reasonable appearance - their dress should be appropriate.
5. Should have an adequate command of the English language.
6. Should have previous interviewing experience, if possible.
7. Ideally, would be similar to the persons being interviewed in terms of race, socio-economic level, etc. This fosters trust and comfort levels and increases the likelihood of honesty in replies.
8. Must be honest in recording answers.
9. Must be reliable in that they must work independently and meet deadlines.
10. Should be well-organized and capable of accurate recording. This may suggest certain educational levels.
11. Must possess a degree of "social sense". Good manners and an ability to get along with others even in tricky situations are important.
12. Must be able to persevere enough to deal with uncooperative respondents, make repeat calls, and ask the same questions over and over again.
13. Should have a pleasant voice including clear tone, reasonable speed, energy, and clarity in pronunciation.

4. Training of interviewers

In the actual training, an overview of the survey should be provided so that interviewers will have a sense of how the project has evolved. In addition to a brief history, training should outline clearly the purposes of the needs assessment and what will be done with the findings. This kind of information serves to motivate workers by making them feel part of a worthwhile project that has social value. Also, the more clear and complete the knowledge of the interviewers, the less chance of bias inaccuracy in the results.

A significant amount of time should be spent reviewing and discussing each question in the questionnaire with specific instructions on how to deal with each one. Interviewers should be instructed to record exactly what the respondent said, word-for-word, rather than interpreting or summarizing responses. It should also be stressed that interviewers should not influence answers by skipping across certain questions while focussing on others, by appearing to be bored, by indicating approval (nodding, smiling) or disapproval (frowning, sighing), by leading statements or fast closures, and so on.

Because many of the mannerisms which may affect the respondent's answer are non-verbal and probably unconscious, it is useful to use role-playing, especially with tape recorders or video machines to detect problem areas. Trainees can pair up to practice actual questions on each other and get feedback about their performance.

Finally, interviewers should be taught some skills. One is how to gently probe for more information with questions such as, "Could you say more about that...?" and "I'm not sure I got all that. Could you tell me again?" These questions also serve to clarify answers. Trainees may also have to deal with some typically difficult responses. When the respondent says he/she doesn't know enough about the topic, he/she needs to be reassured that any information will be helpful and encouraged to try one or two questions. If someone says he/she is too busy, the interviewer should acknowledge the interruption and ask when would be a better time. Where someone is concerned about confidentiality, reassurance should be given that names do not appear on questionnaires without permission.

The training sessions can involve brain-storming some difficult interview situations and coming up with coping methods in advance. From this, a

sheet of "tips for interviewers" can be developed and distributed to trainees. The training session should be fun, but thorough, and can typically be done in less than a day.

CHAPTER V: SECTION B

Staying on Track

1. Supervising interviewers

On-going supervision is necessary until the survey is completed. It's best to review each interviewer's progress early in order to catch potential problems. Then periodic spot-checks or reporting procedures should be mutually agreed upon depending on the size of the survey. In addition, interviewers should have quick access to a key person (co-ordinator or supervisor) in case a problem crops up. The safety and rights of interviewers must be taken into account and it should be stressed that risks and dangerous circumstances are to be avoided. In instances of threats or unsavory locations, special decisions need to be made as to how the situation will be dealt with.

When the survey is completed it is important to thank and/or acknowledge the interviewers. This may be done personally (letter, "thank-you" card, certificate) or publicly (party, notice in the paper). Well-trained interviewers add greatly to the success of a survey. They deserve excellent support and appropriate recognition.

2. Reminders and follow-up letters

It is likely that during the course of a family planning needs assessment, it will be necessary to remind participants about some step of the survey.

In the case of mail-out questionnaires it's recommended that a reminder letter be sent about two weeks after the questionnaire mailing to respondents who have not replied. It time and resources permit, a second letter could follow in about 10 days to any respondents who still have not replied.

Reminder letters should briefly summarize the survey and its purpose, mention how valuable the respondent's contribution is, offer help or further explanation in case the questionnaire is unclear, and thank the respondent for his/her time and help.

Where appropriate, it may be advisable to remind respondents by telephone. This will depend on availability of telephone staff, whether long-distance costs are involved, and whether telephone numbers are available.

3. Role of advisory committee

If there is an advisory committee in place, this group should be with the needs assessment from beginning to end. Members should be well-informed about all aspects of the survey as it moves along.

The committee might meet at pre-determined intervals during the course of the survey and should also be flexible enough to come together on rather short notice in case of unforeseen developments. Liaison would be maintained through the Co-ordinator of the needs assessment and decision-making might be shared according to prior agreement.

CHAPTER V: SECTION C

Data Analysis

1. Computer vs. manual

Advantages and disadvantages of computer vs. manual collating were outlined in Chapter II. Where a computer is used, a person with specialized knowledge about computer operation must be involved. For researchers who conduct the survey to also be expected to learn about computers is unrealistic. Also, the possibility of error is very high. An entire needs assessment survey can be jeopardized by a lack of expertise in computer analysis.

Where results are to be compiled manually, summaries of answers will need to be made. This may involve using codes or charts or developing tables and graphs. Excellent detail about these procedures can be found in Enjoying Research? A 'How-To' Manual on Needs Assessment published by Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Government of Ontario, or from Universities and Colleges, Governments, etc.

2. Interpreting the results

Some results from the needs assessment study will be fairly clear and straightforward. Often the answers to closed-type questions are easily compiled and quickly understood. These are answers to questions which present a choice among alternatives using multiple choice, check-lists, rating scales, etc.

In the case of open-type questions, more time will need to be taken to read the responses, summarize them into categories and look for common themes and trends. For each question, you might write a paragraph which is a composite of replies received. Or else a list of summarized responses may be developed for each question.

It is desirable to have more than one person interpreting results so that differing perceptions are included. The form that is used to record interpretations will depend on the objectives of the survey and on the type of reporting that is required. Will percentage figures be required, expected, useful? Should time be spent developing graphs and tables? Is a lot of detail necessary or was the study seeking to identify general trends?

Perhaps the most exciting stage of a needs assessment is result-gathering and interpretation. This is the culmination of the planning and work that's been done. The way this stage is handled will influence whether the study was viewed as a success or not and will have a bearing on whether results will lead to changes and improvements.

CHAPTER V: SECTION D

Reporting the Findings

1. Planning the reporting procedure

The entire needs assessment, from inception to analysis of results, leads up to the final reporting stage. From the very beginning, an idea of the kind of reporting that will be required should be kept in mind. In fact, a rough outline or file for the final report could be established and entries made during the course of the study. At the conclusion, all that would be necessary would be to pull together the gathered information into the chosen reporting method.

Generally speaking, the following kinds of questions will need to be answered in planning to report the needs assessment findings:

a. To whom must reporting be done?
b. What do the recipients of reports need to know?
c. How detailed should the information be?
d. What methods of presenting the information would be most appropriate for each recipient group?
e. Whose responsibility is it to prepare and/or present final reports?
f. When will reporting be done?

The final point, on timing, is important in terms of what might happen if partial results are "leaked" prematurely or if one group receives the results well before another. The best procedure is to wait until all reports are ready and then to present them more or less simultaneously. This prevents incomplete and hasty conclusions being drawn and suggests a unity among those involved with the research.

2. Methods of reporting

Because there may be several groups who are interested in the results of a family planning needs assessment, consideration needs to be given to appropriate ways of reporting to each. The kind of report requested by a government branch would likely differ from the reporting given to participants in the study and might be different again from the report prepared for the local newspaper.

Reports can vary in tone from analytical scientific to multi-media public relations. Generally, the methods available are:

a. formal written report
b. informal written report
c. structured meeting
d. informal discussion meeting

The following brief descriptions will highlight important aspects of each method.

a. The formal written report includes the following:

- objective(s) of the needs assessment
- methods used to collect the information
- description of the target group(s)
- research results
- analysis of the results
- summary and conclusion

A budget for the needs assessment may also be included and mention made of any relevant funding sources. The kind of language used should be appropriate to the audience of the report. Graphs, tables, etc. often are included in a formal report and here again, consideration must be given to relative advantages and disadvantages or particular needs in each reporting situation.

b. Informal written reports can use such things as

- "quotes" taken from responses to open-ended questions
- photographs of respondents being interviewed
- sketches and illustrations

These devices can make a report more readable, more appealing to a wider audience, and easier to understand. Another possibility is that preparing one informal report may serve to meet the needs of several receivers thereby eliminating the need for several types of reports.

c. A structured meeting would have a pre-determined presentation plan and could include use of:

- audio-visual aids such as videotapes of interviews or other situations, tape recordings of portions of interviews, overhead projectors, flipcharts and so on.
- written hand-outs about the needs assessment findings.
- panel presentation by those involved in the survey.
- a verbal overview of the entire needs assessment survey using a written report as a guideline.

The audience at a structured meeting might be anyone from funders or organization officers to respondents in the survey to staff of the organization to residents of the community. Once again, appropriateness of this method will have to be determined by those involved with the needs assessment.

d. Informal discussion meetings usually introduce the element of dialogue. That is, the audience is involved in the meeting in one of these ways:

- answering selected survey questions and comparing their response to research findings.
- forming small groups to discuss results and inviting their comments and conclusions.
- asking for comments about previously reported findings (eg. newspaper, articles).
- structuring a workshop to get opinions and perceptions about survey results.
- using printed hand-outs as a catalyst for a question-and-answer period.

- other ways that may be chosen in individual cases.

Regardless of the type of written report chosen, the following guidelines should be considered.

FIG. 19 Guidelines for Report Writing

1. Highlight major findings and recommendations at the beginning of the report.
2. Descriptions of survey design, procedures followed, as well as statistical tables, can be presented in an appendix to the report.
3. Write clearly.
4. Highlight the findings, stay away from irrelevant information.
5. Avoid wordiness, don't overexplain.
6. Choose simpler rather than complex or technical language.
7. Use examples for illustration, where possible.
8. Use summary statements.

3. To whom will you report?

The following groups should be considered when decisions are made about who wants/needs to know about research findings:

a. those who initiated the needs assessment.
b. "decision-makers" involved with the organization.
c. those who worked on the study.
d. respondents in the survey.
e. staff and workers in the organization.
f. general public and/or media.

Some of these groups may overlap - for example, it could be that family planning staff initiated the survey, have decision-making responsibilities, and also worked on the study.

Decisions about receiver groups will vary depending on individual circumstances. However, when respondents don't receive a report or the results are not communicated to people working in the organization, cynicism and distrust may result. This leads to a lack of understanding and may

jeopardize commitment to changes planned as a result of the needs assessment. In each case, the question to be asked is, "If we don't report findings to this group, what might the consequences be?"

CHAPTER V: SECTION E

Program Planning Based on Findings

Once the needs assessment has been carried out, the results analyzed, and final reports presented, the exciting task of planning services and programs to reflect the findings begins. If clear objectives were established at the beginning and if these objectives were met in the survey, future directions should be clear.

However, there is always an element of unpredictability in carrying out needs assessment and it may be that the findings will not be able to be translated into action. Assume that one of the needs identified strongly is for a clinical birth control centre. If there is not enough money or staff and inadequate facilities to set up such a clinic, that finding will remain an information item until such time in the future that circumstances might change.

Otherwise, judgments and decisions about introducing new programs and/or modifying existing ones will be made according to local circumstances. New staff may be needed or existing workloads may need to be redistributed. Perhaps staff will require additional training. Office facilities, counselling rooms, etc. may need to be established or rearranged. Liaison with other social, health, or educational services may need to be established or strengthened.

The subject of program planning is a discipline in itself and it is beyond the scope of this manual to pursue it in detail. However, needs assessment can be seen to be a logical and natural precursor to intelligent program planning. To have clearly identified the family planning needs of a community and then to carefully plan programs to meet those needs, can lead to the provision of services "tailor-made" to the people of that community.

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